



ELSAH HISTORY

Number nineteen

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April 1977

Elsah Outbuildings

by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr.

When the architectural staff began the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in 1927, they set out to reproduce a complete picture of an eighteenth century city, including the many outbuildings that served the planter society of Virginia. In the 1920's, eighty-eight of the original structures had survived, including thirty-six outbuildings. By the twentieth century, the majority of these small dependencies had become useless and were difficult to maintain. Although most of the surviving Williamsburg outbuildings were frame, there were some brick kitchens, servants' quarters, smokehouses, and offices. One house retained a two-door privy, dairy, smokehouse, and a brick kitchen.

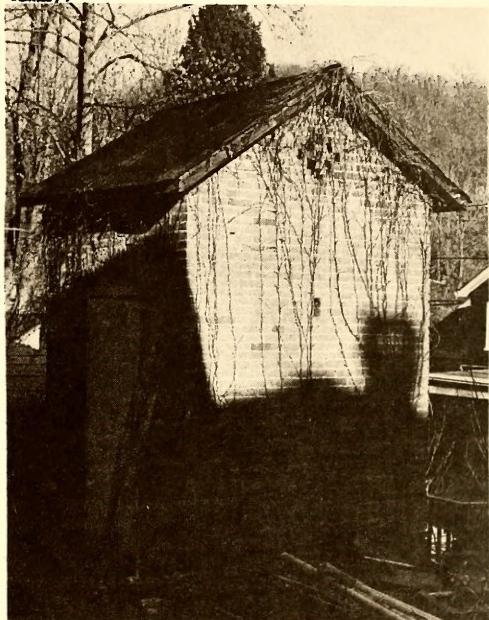
In most instances, these survivals remained chiefly as models for the reconstruction process. Today the visitor to the colonial capital of Virginia sees a large number of outbuildings behind the houses and shops that line the Palace Green and Duke of Gloucester Street. Architects who see this assembly of dependencies note that these buildings give Williamsburg a unique sense of scale and color pattern.

The scale of Elsah in the 1860's must have been just as eye-appealing as that of twentieth century Williamsburg. There were as many outbuildings in the little Illinois town as there might have been in communities built a hundred years before, and many of the uses for these little structures were familiar indeed. The tradesmen of Elsah, for example, needed blacksmith shops, sheds for storing barrels, a buggy shop (which was not an outbuilding), and a few offices. Both Williamsburg and Elsah had a generous sprinkling of privies or "necessary houses," and barns of all sizes and shapes were common. A midwestern farm town lacked separate kitchens and servants' quarters.

There are probably fewer outbuildings in Elsah today than there were in Williamsburg in 1927. Only a few of these buildings in Elsah have retained any usefulness except for garden storage. Nevertheless, the small stone and brick houses are still framed by a scattering of dependencies of all types. A few of them appear to date from the nineteenth century.

The most obvious and interesting Elsah survivals are the Keller barn, the Barnes smokehouse, the wash house next to the Lazenby property, and the Virginia Anderson garage. There are still a few privies and garden sheds in evidence, but they are often of comparatively recent

The Barnes smokehouse, which formerly served the Loehr family.



vintage.

The Grayson property retains some interesting outbuildings. The barn and privy are original structures, though both have been moved. The barn has a new foundation, and its position has been changed to a slightly different angle on the lot. The privy, a two-holer, was moved back, away from the house, it being no longer a "necessary house." The well house is a whimsy.

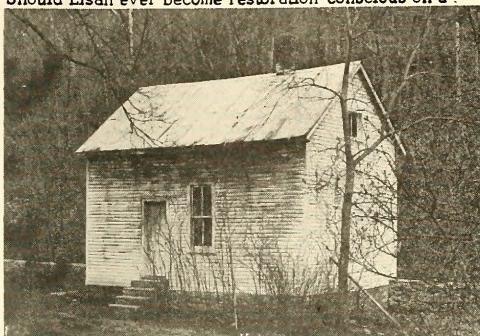
Some twentieth century additions, most notably garages, have continued to fill up the back yards of the Elsah houses. Within the past five years, a few outbuildings have gone down, usually with some purpose. The shed behind the Sonntag home provided old siding for the reconstruction of the buggy shop. The privy behind the antique shop has given way to a gas tank.

Is it really important to save these relics of a bygone age? There is no question that the loss of a considerable number of these structures would change the appearance

of Elsah, and the transformation would not be a happy one. As one looks down the center of the blocks bounded by Mill and LaSalle Streets, the outbuildings serve to create a visual punctuation between the rows of stone and brick houses. On upper Mill Street the outbuildings create a buffer between the houses and the old railroad right-of-way. In color and construction the smaller structures help to set off the houses as if they were an architectural picture frame.

A few of the best outbuildings--the Keller barn and the wash house at the former home of the Haslam family--are important parts of the Elsah scene in their own right.

Should Elsah ever become restoration-conscious on a .



The wash house on Mill Street.

large scale, these survivors will serve as precedents for new construction in the yards of a refurbished village.

The members of Historic Elsah Foundation must become more conscious of the heritage that the earlier villagers have left for us. We must all try to imitate the enlightened efforts made by Elsah citizens like the Keller and the Barnes families in preserving these mementoes of another age. We must all sharpen our artistic and historical vision as we scan the alleys of the village.

It is quite surprising to discover that we have another Elsah--the hidden evidence of an interdependent economy that flourished before the era of the micro-wave oven, discount department store, and flush toilet. This is not to propose that we return to the discomforts of winter walks into the back yard. It is simply a matter of recognizing that the outbuildings serve a decorative and a historical purpose. They are a most attractive background to our village.

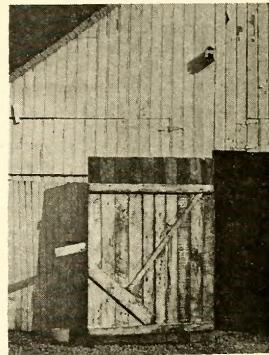


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The Keller barn is the only in-town barn remaining in Elsah.



The Anderson garage affords a view of a straightforward architecture that contains simplicity and functional beauty.



House Tour

On Mother's Day, May 8th, Historic Elsah Foundation is sponsoring its annual house tour. The hours of the tour will be 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

This year the tour will include the following houses: the Bradley house on LaSalle Street, the Jo Copeland house on the corner of LaSalle and Palm, the Pitchford and Robertson houses on Valley Street, the Darnell house on Maple, and the Hosmer and Azar houses on Mill Street.

New to the tour this year are the Pitchford and Robertson houses. The Azar house was on the tour several years ago when it was the home of Myrna Mandorca. The Darnell house was formerly on the tour as the Connell house, but it will be very different inside this year as the Darnells have been working for some time in refurbishing the interior.

In addition these buildings will be included on the tour: Elsah's two churches on Selma Square, the Elsah Landing Restaurant, Joyous Junques Antiques on Mill, the Village Hall, the Village Civic Center, the Buggy Shop, and Glenn Felch's Elsah Crag Gallery.

As previously, crafts and refreshments will be available. Sustaining members get tickets to the house tour free of charge.

The current members of the Board of Trustees of Historic Elsah Foundation are the following: Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., President, Alma Barnes, Cyrus A. Bunting, Mary Ann Pitchford, Paul O. Williams, June Cronin, and Edith Belote. Ingeborg Mack is the Executive Director and a non-voting member of the Board.

News Notes

The new proprietor of the Conoco station in Grafton is Mr. Jerry McCalla, a direct descendant of the first settlers of what is now Elsah, Mr. and Mrs. Addison Greene. Mr. McCalla has lent us some family pictures for copying, including one of William Tonkinson, a long-time resident and former mayor, to whom he is related.

Visitors to the rock and craft shop operated by Professor and Mrs. Forbes Robertson in the old buggy shop on Mill Street will find a museum-like collection of minerals and crystals. These include some spectacular galena crystals from the lead mines of Missouri, some extremely large calcite crystals, flourite from southern Illinois, pyrites, marcasite, agates, geodes in great variety, including some local ones, and other such items. Some crafts are included in the display, and the Buggy Shop, like the Elsah Landing Restaurant, carries copies of the Elsah guidebook.

ELSAH HISTORY is saddened to report the passing of Miss Eva Reintges on Saturday, February 12th, of this year.

Miss Reintges is the granddaughter of Peter Reintges, a stonemason brought to Elsah by General Semple to help with the construction of the first houses. The Reintges family built the Eva Murphy house, on La Salle Street at the upper end of Selma, soon after their arrival. A number of the rock houses in the village bear the workmanship of this early stonemason.

Miss Reintges's father, John, was the first child born in the new village, assumedly in a log house behind the site of the present Eva Murphy house. John Reintges is responsible for other construction in the village, including the Buggy Shop on Mill Street.

The family home associated with John and Anna Reintges is the Snyder house on Mill Street, next to the post office.

Miss Reintges grew up in Elsah and attended the Elsah schools. As a young woman, she served for periods of time as a companion to the young Turners at their estate at Ellestoun.



Miss Reintges shown with her father and mother in Elsah.

The side patio at the Bradley house. Photo by Evan Williams.



The restoration of their house on LaSalle Street by HEF members Ned and Paula Bradley has been receiving nationwide attention.

The first extensive published coverage of this restoration appeared in an earlier ELSAH HISTORY, in an article by Sara Eubank. Last summer, Marilyn Hoffman, of THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR wrote a story on this restoration. This has been picked up by a number of newspapers since that time, most recently by THE WASHINGTON POST, in an article published on Sunday, March 13th of this year, p. F 6. HEF, and our house tour, receive recognition in this article.

Elsah is included in a new book, *THE ROADS THEY MADE: WOMEN IN ILLINOIS HISTORY*, by Adade Mitchell Wheeler with Marlene Stein Wortman, published this year in Chicago by the Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company.

In discussing the activity of women in literature and drama, on p. 103, the text says that "the play 'The New Woman' . . . appeared in the tiny town of Elsah in 1896." The citation given is to the JERSEY COUNTY DEMOCRAT for January 22, 1896. Does anyone know more of this event?

A recent brochure put out by the Greater Alton Chamber of Commerce recognizes Elsah under the heading of "Places and Things to See," remarking, "No visit to the Alton area would be complete without a visit to the charming community of Elsah located northwest of Alton along the Great River Road." We are grateful for this recognition.

LaSalle Two

On the evening of February 6, Historic Elsah Foundation played host to the LaSalle II Expedition, as the group cruised by the village on its way from Montreal to New Orleans and the Gulf.

Led by Reid and Ken Lewis, the group was almost entirely composed of recent graduates of the Elgin Larkin High School, Elgin, Illinois.

The group left Montreal in August, as did LaSalle in his original voyage of 1681 and 1682. Paddling up the Great Lakes in canoes they made themselves, and in costumes as authentic to those of the time as possible, the group attempted to re-enact LaSalle's route and timetable. They had not, of course, figured on such a bitter cold winter. However, they were not deterred from sleeping outdoors in an authentic shelter and travelling without the aid of modern conveniences.

On their journey, they gave a number of "forums," one of which was that held in Elsah. At these forums, the voyageurs entertained their audience with French-Canadian boating songs, banter, and well-practiced comedy. This was followed by a panel discussion by local citizens of some issue of importance.

The Elsah forum dealt with problems in local historic preservation. Chairing the forum was Paul O. Williams. The panelists included Mr. Alfred Mack, Mrs. Mary Ann Pitchford, Professor Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., and Professor Reinhart Ross.

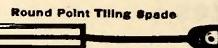
After a rousing discussion, in which the audience took part, refreshments were served, and the audience had a chance to mingle with the voyageurs.

They had not quite reached Elsah on the evening of the forum, and so were camped at Pere Marquette State Park, near the boat landing. They were driven back to the site, where they had already pitched their large, low tent, in order that they could prepare to turn in. It was ten below zero at the time, and they wanted to start a fire to warm up before crawling into their bed-rolls.

Naturally, to be authentic, this had to be done with flint and steel, and when the tinder proved recalcitrant, they had to add a little gunpowder from one of the powder horns. That worked well.

On the next day, they walked to Elsah and camped out behind the Civic Center. That evening they paid a second visit to Principia College, where they had eaten dinner the previous night. There they put on a short performance for the students. The students and voyageurs enjoyed each other mightily, so much so that recently one voyageur, his trip now accomplished, stopped at the campus for a visit on his way home.

The LaSalle II Expedition has been making news for some time, and we are happy to have participated in a small way in their grand expedition. Representative Robert McClory, of Illinois, entered an account of their trip in the Congressional Record of March 15, 1977, pp. E 1493 and 94, when the group was nearing New Orleans and their success was assured.



publications

HEF has a small supply of publications that frequently come into demand. Below is a listing of available materials:

ELSAH HISTORY: Numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, 10-13, and 15-18 are available at 25 cents each, plus 15 cents postage if the copy is to be mailed.

LEAFLETS:

#1 THE MAYBECK PILOT at 25 cents, plus 15 cents postage. This publication outlines the designing and building of the Principia College campus by famous California architect, Bernard Maybeck.

#2 ELSAH CITIZENS at 50 cents, plus 20 cents postage. This publication is chiefly of interest to local genealogists. It consists of listings of 19th century Elsah citizens, including a complete roster of the stones in the Elsah graveyard. This has proved to be one of the most useful research tools HEF has developed.

#3 ELSAH BLUFF PRAIRIES, by Marilyn Bland, at 75 cents, plus 20 cents postage. This study of the unique ecosystems of the bluff prairies in the Elsah area is both scientifically accurate and fascinating.

#4 THE GREAT RIVER: MASTER SCULPTOR, by Percival Robertson, at \$1.50, postpaid. Professor Emeritus Robertson examines the geology of the Elsah area and its fossil remains. Included is a key to various formations one encounters in a drive on the River Road from Alton to Pere Marquette State Park.

#5 CHAUTAUQUA, ILLINOIS, A BRIEF HISTORY, by William Fabian, at \$2, postpaid. This is the most comprehensive history ever done of our neighboring community of Chautauqua.

ELSAH: A HISTORIC GUIDEBOOK, 3rd edition, by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., and Paul O. Williams. This guide to buildings and history of Elsah was awarded a certificate of commendation by the American Association for State and Local History and has long been an aid to visitors to Elsah. Copies have been sent to almost all the states and some far regions of the world. So far it is the most comprehensive history of Elsah.

OTHER ITEMS:

Postcards of Riverview House, with the old road entrance, at 10 cents each, plus postage, unless sent with other items.

Sylvester souvenir, showing a full-color reproduction of a F. O. Sylvester riverscape with information inside, at 25 cents, plus 10 cents postage.

Notebook: A fine Elsah composite scene on 5 different pastel note folders with matching envelopes. A good gift, or a good stationery for short notes to friends. \$1.25, plus postage if necessary.